



I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Academic Assistance Program is for workforce planning and development. It provides a tool for managers and employees to support academic activities that directly relate to the organization's identified knowledge, skills, and behaviors (organizational competencies), and which support the mission, vision, and values of the organization. The Academic Assistance Program is not an employee benefit, right or entitlement; it is a management program for workforce development. Denial of participation in the Academic Assistance Program is not grievable, except on grounds of discrimination.

Use of the Academic Assistance Program shall be identified, described and documented in the employee's development plan within his/her work plan. This provides a measurable link between the employee's increased competency and the agency's workforce planning efforts.

The Academic Assistance Program provides reimbursement of academic costs if funds are available at the division/section level, and/or time off the job if the course is available only during working hours.

II. ELIGIBILITY

- A. **Eligible Employees** – Full-time or part-time (half time or more) employees who have gained permanent status and time-limited permanent employees are eligible for this program. Probationary employees and trainees may be determined as eligible by management after satisfactory performance for a period of not less than three (3) months.
- B. **Ineligible Employees** – Employees in temporary, part-time (less than half time), and probationary status are not eligible for academic assistance.

| Type of Appointment | Is Employee Eligible? | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Yes | No |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permanent full-time or part-time (half-time or more)• Time-limited permanent• Probationary and trainee after satisfactory performance for a period of not less than three months, as determined by management | x x x | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Temporary• Part-time (less than half-time)• Intermittent | | x x x |

- C. Selective Service Registration** - NCGS 143B-421.1 requires employees eligible for selective service to be registered in order to be reimbursed academic costs. The federal Selective Service law specifies that males, both US citizens and immigrant aliens residing in the US and its territories, ages 18 through 25, shall register with the Selective Service.

III. APPROVED COURSES

- A.** Management, when making the determination whether to provide academic assistance to take a specific course, must consider the basic principle: "deemed beneficial to both the agency and the employee." Completion of the course should have a direct benefit to the organization. The improved knowledge, skills and abilities gained by the employee should benefit the individual in completion of his/her current and/or potential job duties. Management should consider workforce planning, succession planning and career development in approving employees to receive academic assistance.
- B.** Guidelines to consider in course selection:
- 1.** Courses which provide knowledge and skills directly related to maintaining or improving current job skills ("current job" means same status and pay); courses mandated by law or regulation or which are required by the employer in order for the employee to retain the job;

2. Courses directly related to the employee's current job or a documented workforce need.
- C. When approving courses, management must consider workforce planning in developing employees who demonstrate the ability to perform at a higher level of responsibility. Hard to recruit classifications are areas in which an employee could be approved to take courses outside his/her current classification level to meet future work needs.
- D. Job-related degrees and corresponding non-work related courses within a degree program may be approved at the discretion of management.
- E. Academic assistance shall not be approved for courses where management has determined that neither the course nor degree is of benefit to the agency.
- F. The Secretary of CCPS or designee may approve exceptions to the approved course policy.

IV. ACADEMIC COURSES

Academic courses are defined as a course/degree provided by an accredited community college/college/university. The course must provide academic credit (as opposed to CEUs), be listed in the college/university course catalog and charge tuition in the traditional meaning of tuition (as opposed to only registration fees). Accreditation must be via an accrediting agency authorized by the US Department of Education.

- A. **Eligible Sources** - Academic courses/degrees from accredited community colleges/colleges/universities via traditional classroom, video-based, distance learning, web-based, e-learning and certain correspondence courses (see Ineligible Sources below) are eligible for approval.
- B. **Ineligible Sources** - Correspondence/college/university courses not accredited by the US Department of Education or the American Council on Education/CREDIT are ineligible under this policy.

V. AUDITED COURSES

Academic courses that are audited are eligible for academic assistance; however, an employee may be reimbursed for the same course or course equivalent only once. Reimbursement requires a statement written on school letterhead and signed by the instructor that the employee attended at least 85% of the scheduled class meetings during the academic term.

VI. THESIS/DISSERTATION RESEARCH COURSES

Job related thesis/dissertation research courses at the masters/doctoral level are restricted as follows:

1. All required written examinations for the degree shall be successfully completed before the course is approved.
2. A maximum of fifteen (15) hours leave may be approved for each academic credit hour. All leave hours must be used during the academic term and may not be accumulated.
3. A maximum total of nine (9) academic credit hours is allowed for any one employee.

VII. CERTIFICATION / LICENSING

Certification/licenses resulting solely from attainment of academic degrees shall be considered under academic assistance for academic coursework. Incumbent employees who meet minimum educational requirements for employment and for whom certification/licensing is required after employment or is deemed desirable by management and approved by the Secretary of CCPS or designee are eligible for academic assistance under the following conditions:

1. Certification/licensing is mandated or
2. Certification/licensing is a policy requirement of the employing agency.

Academic assistance is authorized for certification or licensing only if the certification or license is attained via academic course work.

VIII. ORIGIN OF REQUEST

The employee or management may initiate requests for academic assistance.

A. Employee initiated course to:

1. Maintain/enhance current skills
2. Develop new skills/competencies for career development within the agency

B. Management initiated course to:

1. Ensure employees have mandated licensure or certification
2. Address a shortage of skilled workers in specific classifications
3. Develop a pool of employees for succession planning
4. Build specific high priority skills
5. Address performance expectations of the employee as specified on the performance management improvement plan.

The designation, "management initiated," can only be determined with the approval of the Secretary of CCPS or designee.

IX. REIMBURSEMENT

A. Academic Costs

Eligible employees approved for academic assistance may be reimbursed academic costs charged by the academic source at which the employee is enrolled. Academic costs are defined as charges assessed by an academic source to every person enrolling for the course. These charges are required of everyone and are neither negotiable nor discretionary for the individual enrolling in the course. Academic costs include in-state tuition, fees and course/lab fees. Course/lab fees must always be itemized. Reimbursement of course/lab fees may require a written statement from the academic source justifying the fee as a required fee in addition to other fees.

B. Amount of Reimbursement

1. **University of North Carolina Institutions and Institutions of the North Carolina Community College System** - 100% of academic costs for up to 20 credit hours per fiscal year.
2. **All academic institutions other than institutions of The University of North Carolina and institutions of the NC Community College System** - Up to the maximum academic cost charged by the UNC institutions for up to 20 credit hours or 32 quarter hours per fiscal year. This amount will be determined by OSP and published within 10 working days of the adjournment of the General Assembly and the meeting of the UNC Board of Governors to approve fees. Reimbursement of tuition and fees from out-of-state colleges/universities shall not exceed the amount as specified above.

C. CCPS may also, with a bona fide business justification, reduce the amount of reimbursement per employee to a set amount less than the tuition and fees and/or limit the number of courses for which any one employee may be reimbursed in an academic term. If CCPS chooses to reimburse an amount less than the academic costs specified in the paragraph "Academic Costs" this information shall be available to all employees at the beginning of the fiscal year and apply this limitation in a fair and equitable manner to all employees requesting academic assistance in that fiscal year.

D. Graduate professional programs (medicine, veterinary medicine, business, etc.) with unusual course/lab fees, tuition or other fees will be considered on a course by course basis. The Secretary or his designee may approve payment of these academic costs.

E. Non-reimbursable expenses - Reimbursement shall not be made for:

1. Charges specifically related to processing or receiving continuing education units (CEUs)
2. Application, examination, and graduation fees
3. Transportation costs
4. Textbooks and supplies

- F. **Other financial assistance** - Financial assistance from any other financial aid program shall not be duplicated under this program. However, the difference, if any, between such aid and the allowable costs under the Academic Assistance Program may be reimbursed.
- G. **Free tuition** - When employees of an educational institution or any other State agency are granted free tuition and non-negotiable fees, the value of this tuition and non-negotiable fees must be considered as part of the allowable academic costs.
- H. Management may consider any current disciplinary action for job performance or personal conduct prior to approval of the application for reimbursement.
- I. If funds are available, the applicant shall receive reimbursement of approved academic costs upon submitting evidence of satisfactory completion of a preapproved course. *Completion is defined as "Satisfactory," "Pass," or a grade of "C" or better for undergraduate courses, and a "B" or better for graduate courses.* An "Incomplete" shall not be reimbursed until a final grade is issued.

Requests for reimbursement should be submitted within 30 days of completion of the course or receipt of grade.

- J. **Tax Status** - Congress enacted the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 which allows an employer to offer its employees up to \$5,250 in tax-free (job related and non job-related) educational assistance for undergraduate and graduate level courses begun after December 31, 2001. Note: The exemption expires 12/31/2011 unless extended by Congress.
- K. **Employee Transfers and Separations** - If an employee transfers to another State agency, and subsequently completes an approved course, the employee should submit a request for reimbursement to the employing agency. The employing agency is responsible for processing the request per the provisions of this policy, and providing reimbursement if funds are available.

Employees who separate from State service, except by reduction in force are not eligible for reimbursement.

X. ACADEMIC LEAVE

- A.** An approved course should be taken on the employee's own time. If a course can be taken only during working hours, eligible employees must request academic leave prior to the beginning of the course on the Application for Academic Assistance (CCPS-135) allowing sufficient time for the academic assistance request to be reviewed. Academic leave may be granted unless the supervisor identifies work conditions that will not permit the employee to be absent from the job. Supervisors are encouraged to develop alternate work arrangements to complete the work assignments and also grant academic leave. Reasonable travel time as determined by the supervisor may be permitted to attend approved courses.
- B.** Management may approve academic leave, and, if approved, academic leave shall not be charged to the employee's vacation leave.
- C.** Academic leave during work hours shall not exceed one course (up to five academic credit hours) per academic term. Exceptions to the leave restriction may be addressed using the Academic Leave with Pay provisions of this policy. See chart below to determine how many hours of leave may be granted during an academic term.

| Credit Hours Taken During Semester/Quarter/ Summer Session | Total Number Hours Leave That May Be Granted |
|---|---|
| 1 | 15 |
| 2 | 30 |
| 3 | 45 |
| 4 | 60 |
| 5 | 60 |

XI. COURSES TAKEN AT AGENCY REQUEST

- A.** Because of specific high priority skill needs of the department and/or division, employees may be requested by management to take specific

courses or degree programs. Under these circumstances, the following applies:

1. All limitations under the provisions of the Academic Assistance Policy are waived. Employees are still responsible for requirements for withholding taxes and FICA.
 2. All expenses to the individual should be reimbursed related to acquiring the necessary course or degree to include: travel costs; examinations and administrative fees; textbooks and other course materials. Any books or materials paid for by the division becomes the property of the division. Refer to Textbook Reimbursement for specific information on reimbursement of textbooks.
- B.** If courses taken at agency request exceed the credit hour per fiscal year limitation of the Academic Assistance program, then the situation shall be administered under the policy provision for Extended Academic Leave.
- C.** The designation "At Agency Request" can only be determined with the approval of the Secretary of CCPS or his/her designee.
- D.** Courses specified as part of an employee's improvement/development plan are not considered to be at agency request unless approved by the Secretary of CCPS or designee.

XII. EXTENDED LEAVE

Courses taken at agency request that exceed the credit hour per fiscal year limitation must follow the Extended Academic Leave policy. An agency wishing to initiate a program for a number of employees to participate in a degree or certificate program must also refer to the Extended Academic Leave policy. The State may provide leave with pay or leave without pay for certain types of academic courses. The references to these specific policies are set out below.

- A. Academic Leave Without Pay** - Extended academic leave without pay may be granted in accordance with the normal leave policy as outlined in the Leave Without Pay Policy of the State Personnel Commission.

- B. Academic Leave With Pay** – Extended academic leave with pay may only be granted with Office of State Personnel approval.
- C.** State agencies may consider any employee (permanent, probationary, trainee or time-limited) for extended academic leave to participate in job or career-related work-study, scholarship or fellowship programs based upon the following criteria:
 - 1. Verification that both labor market and organizational needs exist for development in the program requested.
 - 2. Equal opportunity provided in selection of candidates.
 - 3. Employees are informed of agency policies and procedures regarding:
 - a. Announcement and application procedures,
 - b. Screening and selection of employees,
 - c. Limitations and restrictions on academic courses,
 - d. Leave, salary, benefit conditions, withholding taxes and FICA, and
 - e. Reimbursement agreement.

Requests for extended academic leave initiated by the employee and which do not meet with the above criteria will be administered according to the State Personnel policy on leave without pay.

XIII. TEXTBOOK REIMBURSEMENT

If the employee takes a course “At Agency Request,” the division may reimburse the employee for required course textbooks but the textbooks become property of the division. Exception: If an employee enrolls in a microcomputer course through the Professional Skills Program, sponsored by Wake Technical Community College, “At Agency Request,” the department will be invoiced for required textbooks unless the employee requests to retain the textbook as personal property.

Textbooks purchased by the division must be stamped as division property and remain with the division if the employee terminates employment. Each division is responsible for determining the process for ensuring textbooks purchased by the division are stamped as division property. Procedures for obtaining textbook reimbursement are as follows:

- A.** The employee is responsible for obtaining a receipt for the textbook whether the textbook is bought at the class or from a bookstore.
- B.** The employee shall claim reimbursement for a textbook by completing a Reimbursement of Travel and Other Expenses Incurred form (CCPS-50 or 51), attaching the receipt, and submitting the form and receipt through the division's chain-of-command for approval. The division forwards the reimbursement request to the department's Fiscal Office.
- C.** If the employee wants to personally own and retain the course textbook, the employee is not eligible to receive reimbursement for the textbook. The employee is ineligible for textbook reimbursement unless he/she is taking the course "At Agency Request."

XIV. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

- A. Instructions for Initiating the Application for Academic Assistance (CCPS-135)**
 - 1.** Prior to beginning the course, the employee shall complete the Application for Academic Assistance (CCPS-135) according to instructions listed on the application form.
 - a.** Discuss proposed course with his/her supervisor to determine that the course is job related and eligible for academic assistance.
 - b.** Complete Section I of the application and submit the application for supervisory and division director/designee approvals (Section II) *prior to enrollment*.
 - (1)** Supervisory Approval – The supervisor completes Section II by signing and dating the form and checking the block "The proposed course is considered to be directly related to the employee's work assignment and will be beneficial to job performance." Approved applications shall be forwarded to the division director or designee for approval. If the course is not approved by the supervisor, a written explanation shall be provided to the employee. A copy of the completed

application and denial letter shall be provided to the Division Director/designee.

- (2) Division Director Approval – The division director or designee completes Section II by signing and dating the form. The director's signature authorizes approval to encumber funds from the division's budget for approved academic costs and/or for the employee to receive academic leave, if necessary. Division approval indicates request is in accordance with the provisions of the Academic Assistance Policy. The division shall indicate the reimbursable amount and budget code in Section II of the form. If the course is not approved by the division, a written explanation shall be provided to the employee. Division approval indicates that:
 - i. The employee is eligible to participate in the Academic Assistance program
 - ii. Course is deemed beneficial to the agency and the employee
 - iii. Course is provided by an accredited institution
 - iv. Money is available to reimburse employee

Special Authorizations: The division director checks the appropriate block(s) if the Application for Academic Assistance is approved as an "Exception to the approved course policy" and/or if the course is authorized "At Agency Request" and forwards the application to the Secretary of CCPS for approval.

c. Complete one form for each course.

2. The application should be submitted in advance, in accordance with schedules established by the division, to allow time for appropriate review, approval and notification to the employee prior to the beginning of the course. The division director may approve an application received after a course begins if circumstances warrant and if academic assistance funds are available in the division's budget.

3. Employees applying for academic assistance shall receive a written response from division management regarding approval/disapproval of academic assistance requests which notes any changes in the application or conditions of approval.

B. Instructions for Filing for Reimbursement After Course Completion

1. After completing the course, the employee files for reimbursement using the pre-approved Application for Academic Assistance according to the instructions listed on the form:
 - a. Attach a receipt (cancelled check will not be accepted) and official course grade or verification of satisfactory completion to the pre-approved Application for Academic Assistance. The department interprets successful completion as a grade of "C" or better if the course is taken for undergraduate academic credit or a "B" or better if the course is taken for graduate academic credit (or an equivalent grade on an alternative grading system).
 - b. Complete Section III of the pre-approved Application for Academic Assistance by entering the amount to be reimbursed, signing and dating the application.
2. The employee shall forward the original pre-approved Application for Academic Assistance, receipt and course grade or verification of satisfactory course completion to division director/ designee for reimbursement approval (Section IV of the Application for Academic Assistance). Upon approval, the division director/designee shall forward request to CCPS Fiscal Section for payment. A copy of the approved request shall be returned to the employee.
3. Requests for reimbursement should be submitted within thirty (30) days of course completion.

XV. ADMINISTRATION RESPONSIBILITY

- A. The CCPS Organizational Effectiveness Office, with guidance from

the Office of State Personnel, is responsible for the interpretation of this policy and administration of the Academic Assistance Program in the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety. The CCPS Organizational Effectiveness Office and the CCPS Internal Auditor will annually assess division compliance with the policy.

- B.** Each division is delegated responsibility for, and authority to, administer the program within the provisions of this policy. The delegation is contingent on the prior submission of a written policy outlining procedures to implement the program and the written approval of the CCPS Organizational Effectiveness Office and the Office of State Personnel. Any subsequent policy, procedures, or practice that either liberalizes or restricts this policy, likewise requires prior written approval of the Office of State Personnel. State Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Policies, Procedures and Rules, including those pertaining to statistical data, are applicable to all rules in this policy. Each division is responsible for retaining records of academic assistance activity according to department retention schedules. Each division shall maintain signed copies of all approved and denied applications.
- C.** Each division is responsible for providing the Organizational Effectiveness Office with records of academic assistance activity (1) by July 15 of each year and (2) upon request, by providing copies of all applications (both approved and disapproved) and the following information for each application approved:

 - 1.** Employee's Name & Position
 - 2.** School Attended
 - 3.** Name of Course
 - 4.** Course Begin/End Dates
 - 5.** Course Level (Undergraduate/Graduate)
 - 6.** Mandated/Required for Certification/Licensure
 - 7.** Academic Credit Hours
 - 8.** Academic Leave Granted
 - 9.** Course Grade
 - 10.** Amount of Reimbursement
 - 11.** Other Special Course Features (Audit, Thesis/Dissertation Research Credit, "At Agency Request", or Extended Academic Leave)

Each division shall also provide the Organizational Effectiveness Office with copies of denied applications and accompanying justification letters.

- D.** The CCPS Organizational Effectiveness Office is responsible for retaining statistical records of academic assistance activity. This information shall be reported annually to the Office of State Personnel upon request and shall include the following data:
 - 1.** Total number of employees participating in the Academic Assistance Program.
 - 2.** Total amount reimbursed.
 - 3.** Total number of employees granted Academic Leave.
 - 4.** Total number of employees taking courses at agency's request.
 - 5.** Total number of employees granted Extended Academic Leave.
 - 6.** Total number of employees taking audited courses.
 - 7.** Total number of employees taking courses for the purposes of mandated/required certification/licensing.
- E.** Statistical information should be kept on a fiscal year basis, beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30. All information should be available to the Office of State Personnel as requested.